

# SOME SOCIAL RESULTS OF THE MEATLESS DIET

BY

ERNEST BELL, M.A.

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## SOME SOCIAL RESULTS OF THE MEATLESS DIET.

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By ERNEST BELL, M.A.

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My object in this article is to show you that vegetarianism is not merely a question of what we shall have for dinner or whether we must give up bacon for breakfast, as many people seem to think, but is very much more, and that in fact, the flesh-eating fallacy, like a stream of impure blood circulating through the body and affecting every part, permeates the whole of our social system and daily lives, from the shoes we wear in the road to a string quartet in our concerts, and from drunkenness in the streets to the hymns in church.

Our opponents almost invariably attack us on scientific as opposed to ethical grounds. They tell us, for instance, that scientifically we are wrong to try to live without meat and that it is impossible to be healthy without animal food.

They tell us of the chemical ingredients needed to form the necessary muscle, though they have the elephant and the horse staring them in the face—they tell us that the so-called “canine” teeth prove that we were meant to eat meat, though they know—or ought to know—that these teeth are much more highly developed in apes, and that wild boars have them in really splendid form—they tell us that the structure of our bodies shows that flesh is our natural diet, though everyone knows that we cannot eat it until it has gone through the *unnatural* process of being cooked; all of which is amusing but silly, but of course we have to meet them on their own ground and follow the scriptural injunction to “answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own conceit.”

They do not see that they are giving themselves away all the time.

They never—and this is my point—they never tell us that we are morally wrong in abstaining from flesh food. They almost all, without exception, admit that we are “amiable fools,” “well-meaning” but misguided fanatics, people with “excellent intentions” but very little sense at the back of them. They, in fact, admit that as far as sentiment is concerned, we are quite right, commendable and altogether admirable. It is our intellects only which are at fault.



Their compliment is one which, unfortunately, we cannot return. We cannot by any stretch of amiability say, or feel, that the meat-eater is actuated by any lofty motive in his choice. He has no unselfish ideal to work out in the matter. His whole effort is to defend or excuse that which his feelings all the time tell him is a selfish and cruel practice. He has to shut his eyes to much that he dares not face, to try to invent so-called scientific reasons to excuse that which in itself is obviously very undesirable and discreditable—"a painful necessity," as he sometimes calls it.

Personally, I would rather rank as a well-meaning fool than an unscrupulous rascal, but there is no need at present to make the choice, as in this case we have reason as well as sentiment on our side. We have often been told that what is morally wrong cannot be scientifically right.

The world is, quite rightly, governed by feeling, and not by human reason. The man whose heart or feelings are in the right place may not be so successful, from a purely worldly point of view, as the one who calculates all costs and acts for material good mainly, but he carries with him the motive power which will lead him onwards and upwards and develop the more perfect character, which the other is daily making it more difficult to attain.

It is with nations as with individual units who compose them, and we have lately had before us the example of the ill-effects on a great nation of basing its conduct on intellect solely, to the contempt and neglect of right feeling. It was a German philosopher who wrote more than a century ago,

"The man who has most sympathy is the best man—is the one most disposed towards social virtues, to nobleness of every sort. He who awakens our compassion makes us better and more virtuous."

His nation had forgotten this and the results have not been such as to lead the world to think that the philosopher was wrong. If our feelings are right, as our opponents somewhat condescendingly admit, we need have no fear that the results will be wrong.

Let us now come to our special subject and look at some of the effects on the world, which would result from the general abandonment of the flesh diet, and I think we shall find that it is more far-reaching than most people have any conception of, and that in our work of reform we have ranged against us really tremendous forces.

Firstly, of course, we are faced with the great slaughter-house question, and it is difficult to grasp what this means and the number of persons whom it influences directly and indirectly throughout the world.

At Chicago, the great American centre, are *miles* of slaughter-houses, covering an area large enough for a city, with railway trains,

electric trams, and elaborate and costly machinery to carry out the work. It is estimated that 100,000,000 animals are annually slaughtered in America for food.

In all countries on the Continent of Europe are elaborately equipped abattoirs, where millions of animals are killed, and England has its Deptford and its unnumbered small slaughter-houses. In connection with these places are also gangs of those young women known as "gut girls" whose business it is to clean the entrails of slaughtered animals.

We are not concerned here with the cruelty of the whole business, but with the number of people who are employed in this unsavoury work and spend their lives in the demoralising surroundings. Mr. Charles Booth, in his book on "Life and Labour in London," in speaking of the slaughterman, says. "Though far from the poorest they are the most degraded class, the simplest and grossest forms of physical indulgence are all they ask from life. The conditions of the work have also a degrading effect on the young women employed. . . . altogether there seems to be a quite exceptional amount of low-toned life,"—and I think no one can wonder at this. The number of people, men and women, engaged in this degrading work must be reckoned by many millions.

But this is only the beginning of it. In connection with the trade we have the overseas traffic in cattle—from North and South America, the Cape, Egypt, the Continent and Ireland. No one can defend this traffic ethically. All admit that something ought to be done by *someone*, but they all patronise it in the meantime by consuming its products. Here again are other *millions* of people employed in the horrible work.

Nor is this all. The Cattle Raisers must not be omitted, the Cowboys, the Farmers, with a hundred thousand markets all over the world, all centres of a vast trade. And in addition to this the tanners, the manufacturers of the implements and instruments employed, the poleaxes, cauldrons, pulleys, etc., etc.

We have here many millions of men and women getting a living out of this great abuse. Imagine the difference to the world if all these were set free to do some other more humanising work. And what is the net result at the other end? A writer in the *Daily News* has quoted Prof. Wood's figures showing that

"a pig consumes 12 lbs. of dry grain to manufacture 1 lb. of pork; a fowl's ratio is 14 to 1, a sheep's 24 to 1, and a fat bullock's 64 to 1. The last is monstrous. 64 lbs. of corn to one of meat casts a serious shadow over the roast beef of Old England . . . our dear loaf comes directly from the fact that the bullock and the sheep and the pig are eating 9,000,000 tons of grain to our 5,000,000 tons, and the obvious remedy is to abolish the sheep and the pig and the bullock. It is not a question of the relative benefits of vegetarianism. When things are easier the bullock may flourish again, if he is wanted, but this is not the time for beef. The rate of exchange is too high."

What sort of science is it that seeks to justify this wholesale infringement not only of the law of humaneness but also of all



economic laws. The fishing trade again, though not so large as the other, extends over all the world and means that other millions of men and women are spending their lives in the actual fishing and in the manufacture of the necessary appliances in the way of boats, fishing tackle, etc. Will they not also be employed in more humane and edifying work when vegetarianism reigns in the world?

These are the most obvious outcomes of the meat habit, and to overcome them might seem to be a Herculean task, but if you will think a little you will see that this is not by any means all. The habit permeates everything. Shoe leather, saddles, gloves, furs, numerous other articles of clothing, hair brushes, violin strings, gelatine, glue, and a hundred other things in daily use are all by-products of animal slaughter with their millions of producers. The purveyors of all such things will all naturally regard us as dangerous fanatics interfering with their trades.

It is not only in material things that we shall note a difference. Our institutions, our games, our art, our literature, our language and our religions will also be affected.

Turning first to the subject of games, dear to the heart of the average Englishman, must we not see that with the eating of flesh the whole abomination of blood-sports must also go of necessity—when men have developed a little more sense and humane feeling and have lost the *excuse* that the birds and the so-called ground game are used for food. Will they dare in these more enlightened days to defend the pure love of killing for its own sake?

Here again the reform will interfere with very large numbers of influential men and very large tracts of country. All of these we have, of course, against us in our reform.

Once more, will the torture of animals for scientific purposes be tolerated when the torturers have lost the excuse that we kill for food and therefore they may kill for science? I believe not, and I think they themselves know it, so the whole of that group—who are now numerous and influential beyond their numbers—is ranged against us.

Our literature, I said, will also call for revision. Our poets, on the whole, have been much superior to the prose writers, naturally, since the vegetarian system is the poetry of diet as cannibalism is the prose, but still they have not all been immaculate and will have to mend their ways. Think of that “Assyrian who came down like a wolf on the fold, while his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold.” We shall have no folds in those happy times we hope, and no call to abuse senselessly the wolf who is not really half so ferocious as human beings often are at the present time. The poet indeed admits that the Assyrian was no better than the wolf.

Our language, as everyone knows, is a tell-tale witness of past history, and its barbarities will need much expurgation. When vegetarianism reigns in the land we shall not abuse people by calling them as "silly as sheep" or as "fat as pigs," for instance. We shall then know the sheep and the pig only in their natural states, where the one is a skilful and sagacious mountain climber and the other a well-proportioned athlete, who can clear a five-barred gate.

Our proverbs, too, which are held to store up the wisdom of the past, will call for revision. Imagine really refined people expressing themselves by saying, "The nearer the bone the sweeter the meat"—is it not horrid? Or how can one imagine anyone but a barbarian talking of killing two birds with one stone? To "spur" one on to further exertion will become a tell-tale expression of the present barbarous times. Again, how distressing it is to hear a gentle young lady telling you that all her plans for a holiday were "knocked on the head"—a simile evidently taken from the slaughter-house. A "bone of contention," again, is not a nice thing, and in real vegetarian days we shall be quite content then with an "apple of discord." Whether in those days we shall still be as much addicted to over-eating that our favourite method of expressing that we are tired of anything is that we are "fed up with it"—as at present is the case—I dare not prophesy, but I hope not.

Even our Bible will have to be revised once more when the humane diet becomes general. Who will be able to pray to the god whose are the cattle on a thousand hills, when there are no more any cattle on the hills; and where will be the need to order that the kid shall not be seethed in its mother's milk when kids are no longer seethed at all? The hymn books will fare no better and will need expurgation. It has always been a mystery to me how hymn singers could accept that very unchristian simile "as pants the hart for cooling streams when heated in the chase, so longs," etc., but I need not finish it. Could anything be more incongruous and barbaric?

These and many other ideas will, we may hope, be banished from our religious books. But this too will meet with much opposition from the numberless people who cling by preference to old barbarities.

I had almost forgotten that large and influential body of men and women, dear to the hearts of all unhealthy people, who, alas! are in a great majority under our present system. I mean the medical profession. What will be the effect of the meatless diet on their calling? Is it any wonder that they do not as a body look with approval on our reforms and tell us that the falsely named canine teeth show that we ought to live on cooked flesh? Surely when the world changes its evil habits they will be amongst the first to dwindle in numbers and in material prosperity.

Vegetarians can be ill, we know unfortunately, and at some time or other they do require a signature to a death certificate, and



until we mend our ways in many other matters there will be calls for hygienic doctors, but I think there is no doubt that the meatless feeder enjoys much better health than the meat eater. His ailments are fewer and lighter, as one might expect—his life being simpler altogether—and the general adoption of the diet would largely reduce all doctors, surgeons, hospital operations, inoculations, drugs, stimulants, sedatives, and all that appertains thereto. Think only what this would mean and the millions whom it would affect.

Of the great subject of war we cannot speak with any certainty. Will it also cease when the world becomes vegetarian? I am not sure. I have heard rumours that some members of vegetarian societies have been known to quarrel amongst themselves, and what the individual does is reproduced in the race. There is, however, no evidence obtainable that they have ever shown any inclination to resort to bayonets and bombs, mines or poison gases, as yet, and I think there is amongst us less pugnacity and more desire for the peaceful life than amongst some others; so we may, perhaps, safely assume that in working for our cause we are working also against the continuation of all wars. Think only what that will mean. Picture the millions of people over the world even in times of peace who spend their lives preparing for war—the War Offices, the General Staffs, the Armies, the Navies, the Shipbuilders, Uniform Makers, Munition Workers, Tax Collectors and millions of others too numerous to mention. Will they all welcome the reform which will make unnecessary their work? I think not until the world has advanced somewhat.

There is just one other point in which the triumph of our cause will make an enormous difference. I mean in our view of the so-called "lower animals." It is impossible for anyone to accord to them any modicum of rights as long as so many of the most familiar are regarded only as prospective "meat" and the main idea raised by them is whether or not they will be good eating or whether their joints will be better roasted or boiled, or served up with horseradish, mint sauce, or currant jelly.

Is it any wonder that so many people still hold to that foolish and unphilosophical idea that the animals were created for our benefit?

The latest humane teaching is that all life is one and that the golden rule of doing to others as we would wish them to do to us must apply equally to all sentient creatures. The very first application of this would be to spare them an unnatural life followed by a cruel death.

But I have said enough—perhaps too much. Readers can follow out the subject for themselves if they like, and will see more and more, how our daily lives, our morals, our methods, our



religions and our institutions, our games and our tools, our dress, are all influenced by and are largely dependent on this great fallacy of meat-eating.

We have then to realise that we have ranged against us really tremendous material forces and all the millions who are engaged in the above trades and callings, with all the selfishness that is centred in the instinct of self-preservation.

No one likes to give up what he is accustomed to or that by which he makes personal profit, and all will fight to prove by "reason," as they call it, that what they are used to and profit by is RIGHT.

I do not say this to discourage you in any way, but rather that you may take courage; and to show you how, in spite of the tremendous odds against us, we who are still only a small handful of workers—enthusiastic fanatics if you like—have for years been making very appreciable progress.

There is one reason only for this, and that is that we have Right on our side. Lately the needs and teaching of the war have, I think, given our cause a good help, which without the war would have taken years to accomplish, but which even the war would not have accomplished if we had not been preparing the ground for 70 years beforehand. The whole country has now realised that men can live without meat. We have all talked about meatless days, all the newspapers have advocated meatless days and print meatless recipes. Even Members of Parliament have had meatless luncheons—and are still alive—they may not have liked them and have not adhered to them longer than they were obliged, but they have practically demonstrated the fallacy of the assertion that meat is an essential to life and health. I say we need not feel at all discouraged even when we reckon up the enormous forces of our enemy. All evil is self-destructive. We have right on our side and are bound to win in the end.

And all can help, and that in ways which may not be apparent at first sight. Let us vegetarians realise and show in our daily lives that our cause is only one facet of the jewel of Truth, one branch of the Love that overcometh all things. We cannot advance alone, that is without the corresponding progress in other branches of rightness. We see this on all sides. Vegetarians who have become so from conviction, not on purely selfish grounds, are all strivers after other high ideals, and on the other hand, we notice very distinctly that those persons who lead other humanising movements—Theosophy, New Thought, Christian Science, Women's Emancipation, Universal Peace, and the Simple Life in its ideal teaching—inevitably find their way towards the humane diet.

And this may show you how all can help in the work, how all who are honestly striving after the Ideal *must be helping*, even

without being conscious of it. You may not be writers or speakers or demonstrators of cookery, but you are all spiritual beings, striving after a high ideal, and on the other hand, you all carry about with you a personal influence—often all the more powerful because it is unconscious—and just in as far as you are fearlessly living out a pure and sympathetic life and one helpful to all those with whom you come in contact—whether human or subhuman—you will be helping on our great and good Cause, and with it at the same time all other good Causes.

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